

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (New Revised Standard Version)

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Matthew 22:1-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

During seminary, one of my classmates used to say, C = M.Div.

or all I need to pass my courses & earn a M. degree are C's.

His approach to class-work was to do just enough to get by, to pass,  
but he never really enjoyed his studies or his years at seminary.

My perspective and my attitude were somewhat different.

I tried to soak it all in, grasp & absorb everything I could,  
and it wasn't about just passing the coursework for me.

I'd given up a fairly lucrative business career to attend seminary,  
and so I wanted to gain as much as I could from that opportunity,  
and as it turns out, my seminary years were among  
the very best & most satisfying years of my life.

Both Bible passages that we looked at today are about opportunities,  
and about choosing to make the most of God's gracious blessings,  
by committing ourselves to the Lord **more intentionally**  
so to grow deeper and develop along our journey of faith.

It's living in the knowledge of God's infinite love and grace which  
fundamentally changes our whole outlook and direction in life,  
as we choose to become those whom God designed & calls us to be,  
toward a godly perspective of walking with & enjoying the Lord.

Deuteronomy comes at the end of 40 years in the wilderness,  
just before the people would finally enter the Promised Land.

The question was, would they respond faithfully to

the grace of God's promise and the gift of land?

Entering the Promised Land is also used as a metaphor that refers to living into God's grace, hope and sovereignty, and our spiritual journey toward the promised Kingdom of God.

In the Deuteronomy passage today, Moses won't be entering with them, so Moses wouldn't be there to keep a watchful eye on them anymore.

So like a parent warning their child about to leave home,

he's offering helpful advice & admonition: vs. 15~17, 19

*I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey ... by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments ... the Lord your God will bless you in the land ...*

*But if your heart turns away ... you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.*

*... I have set before you, life and death, blessings and curses. **Choose life** so that you and your descendants may live.*

Choose life so that you and your descendants may live... choose life

choose to walk within the blessing and promises of the Lord,

choose today to seek a deeper, more faithful and satisfying,

a more meaningful and authentic relationship with your God.

In response to God's love and grace, compassion and blessings, the people were to be dispensers of God's love, grace & blessings,

by loving the Lord, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments.

As I thought about these Scripture passages for today,

and my own life experiences and my spiritual journey,

I realized that my most significant growth-steps as a Christian,

were when I was willing to make difficult and demanding choices,

as the Lord opened up areas where God blessed me in response.

It was a matter of trusting God's grace, power and promises, by

deciding to step out in faith & choosing to take God more seriously,

which seemed to make a little more room and space for

the Holy Spirit to move & wiggle more freely in my life.

For me it was toward a more committed, active and disciplined faith.

**- in prayer**

my prayer life became more focused, specific and consistent.

I found that writing my prayers helped me stay more focused,  
as a letter to a trusted friend about my life's concerns.

**- in Bible study**

my Bible reading was also more consistent and delved deeper.

I read slow enough to try and picture what I was reading  
with pauses to consider how it might apply to my life.

**- in fellowship and worship participation**

I was far more faithful in attending church and programs.

I made more effort at trying to connect with others  
by intentionally being more open & trying to listen,  
by being more active within a community of faith.

**- in the life-choices I was making**

I considered how my attitude, my words and my actions  
were contributing toward the person I was becoming,  
and was it really in the direction I wanted to grow.

**Were the choices I was making leading toward my highest goals in life?**

It's really about the choices we make in life,

and one will bring us closer to God, and the other option does not.

One makes more room for Jesus to move and work in our life,  
and the other limits or even shuts the Holy Spirit down.

**The Matthew passage is also about our choices that we make in life.**

The parable Jesus tells in the Matthew passage is part of a series  
that point back to the leaders of Israel rejecting Jesus and  
point ahead toward God's gracious invitation to all humanity.

The parable scene, that Jesus is describing, **is drawn from**  
a vision of God's kingdom as great banquet feast, **Isaiah 25:6-9**,  
in which all are invited by grace - welcome to partake.

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make **for all peoples a feast** of rich food, ... he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,... for the LORD has spoken. ... This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

The parable scene, that Jesus is describing, **also looks ahead**

to the promised wedding banquet feast described in Revelation 19 & 21,

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are **invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.**" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." (Rev 19:9 & 21:2-4)

**That is the theme of God's Kingdom as gracious love and acceptance,  
that seeks out the lost, the broken sinner and rejected outcast  
flowing all through the life, the teachings & parables of Jesus,**

including the parable that we read earlier today, vs. 2

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

The parable is much more than just a story.

The king obviously is God, Jesus is the king's beloved son,  
and the invited guests were the Jewish leaders and nation.

The servants in the parable represent  
the OT prophets sent by God calling Israel to repent.

In the days of this parable when someone as powerful as a king was  
hosting a feast as important as celebrating the wedding of his son,  
first, they would send a "save the date" notice of invitation.

Then, based on the number of acceptances from the invited guests,  
the host would determine how many animals to slaughter  
and how much food it would be necessary to prepare.

**Obviously anyone who accepted the invitation was obligated to come  
since the amount of food was being specifically prepared for them.**

Since there wasn't any refrigeration for food storage,  
the meal would have to be prepared that day of the banquet,  
specifically for the number that had been invited.

So then, when everything was finally ready and set for the feast,  
the host would send a servant back out to the guests again, vs. 3,

He sent his slaves to call those **who had been invited** to the wedding banquet, **but they would not come.**

**The guests who had accepted invitation wouldn't come,**  
and in that culture this would have to be seen and interpreted  
as a deliberate insult and as intending to humiliate their host.

Furthermore, to reject such an invitation from the king  
celebrating the wedding of his son and his heir  
was an act of rebellion and insurrection against his rule...

**... which would have been shocking and unheard of to his listeners**  
and points toward the religious leaders who had rejected Jesus.

But according to the parable, in an astonishing  
move of unexpected and unreasonable grace. vs. 4

**Again he sent other slaves,** saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner,

my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.'

Surely they would respond to grace extended a 2<sup>nd</sup> time to them, vs. 5-6.

But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.

Some ignored the King's invitation by making silly excuses --  
too busy with farm, or business, or out in the world,  
inferring, 'my other things matter more to me than you do,  
which was rejecting the king by rejecting his invitation.

Some reject more violently,  
even mistreating – and killing the king's messengers,  
just as OT prophets & even Jesus himself were rejected & killed,  
& again, pointing toward the religious leaders response to God's son.

**The banquet feast represents the promised Kingdom of God.**

**The Pharisees are responding to Jesus and his mission of grace  
exactly like the rude guests who reject the host's invitation.**

Attacked and rejected by the religious authorities  
for welcoming and eating with sinners and outcasts as acceptable,  
**by this parable, Jesus explained his life, mission and ministry.**

And the judgment of this parable is also perhaps a warning that  
the city of Jerusalem would be, and was utterly destroyed during  
the Jewish rebellion by the Roman General Titus in 70 AD, vs. 7-8

The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

During the time when Matthew's gospel was being written,  
and the gospel was starting to spread out into the gentile world-  
a situation which the parable also intended to address.

Israel and the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus the Messiah, God's Son,  
and now everyone, even gentiles were welcome and invited to come,  
to enter God's kingdom, welcome to attend the banquet feast vs. 9-10

Go therefore into the main streets, and **invite everyone** you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, **both good and bad**; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

The leaders and Israel turned down the invitation of the Lord,  
and Jesus responded by expanding the reach of God's grace,  
by seeking out for himself the lost and rejected,  
inviting the outcasts and sinners into relationship.

**both good and bad** were welcome, and accepting the grace of invitation  
was the only qualification that was necessary to attend the feast.

The truth of God's unrelenting love & mercy and unreserved grace  
toward even the lowest of outcasts and most petulant of sinners  
was the crux of the life, mission & ministry of Jesus Christ,  
**and became the transforming message of the early Church.**

The message, that we are called and commanded by God to proclaim,  
the wonderful truth that the Church is equipped to make known,  
is that God loves us, loves us each and every one of us,

regardless of our sins and mistakes, faults & failures,  
regardless of our situation or the trouble we are in,

and receiving that truth of God's unrelenting love and blessings,  
has the incredible power to transform our whole mode of living,  
create wonderful new possibilities & change everything about us.

And whether we respond to God's love with faithful obedience or not,  
God will still always love us regardless of what we may say or do.  
In love God continues to say, yes, even when we are shouting, no.

**That is also a picture of a faithful church, the body of Christ,  
where all are invited to receive grace through Jesus Christ,  
a gift unexpected, undeserved and unearned,  
the life-changing grace of God to the unworthy.  
The vision and the promise are that all are welcome and invited,  
because all equally loved, precious and valued by our God.**

The message, which the Church exists to proclaim to the world  
is that in this world, God will never reject or abandon us,  
and that God's love for us will never change, fade or grow dim.

As Isaac Watts wrote,

... Love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.